Between 70 A.D. and 313 A.D. were any of the Christian Bishops and other church leaders martyred simply because of their ecclesiastical power and not their faith in Christ?

The answer to your question is **yes**, but with an important historical nuance: for the Roman Empire, "ecclesiastical power" and "faith" were often legally indistinguishable because refusing to worship the state gods was viewed as political treason.

However, there are specific instances where Christian leaders were targeted **specifically for their political influence, lineage, or organizational power**, rather than simply for their personal belief in Christ.

1. The Political Martyr: Simeon of Jerusalem (c. 107 A.D.)

The clearest example of a leader executed for "political" reasons separate from (but alongside) his faith is **Simeon**, the second Bishop of Jerusalem and a relative of Jesus.

- **The Charge:** Simeon was accused not just of being a Christian, but of being a **descendant of David**.
- **The Motivation:** Emperors Domitian and Trajan were paranoid about Jewish uprisings and sought to hunt down anyone from the "royal line" of David who might claim the throne of Israel as a rival king.
- **The Outcome:** Roman officials tortured and crucified Simeon at the age of 120. While his Christianity was part of the accusation, the primary driver for the state's interest was his **political lineage** as a potential pretender to a Jewish throne, which threatened Roman sovereignty in Judea.[1] [2]

2. The "Rival to the Throne": Pope Fabian (250 A.D.)

By the mid-3rd century, the Bishop of Rome had become such a powerful figure that the Roman state viewed the *office itself* as a threat to imperial authority.

- **The Context:** Emperor Decius initiated the first empire-wide persecution to restore the *pax deorum* (peace of the gods).
- **The Quote:** Decius reportedly declared that he would **"far rather receive news of a rival to the throne than of another bishop of Rome."** [3] [4]
- **The Implication:** This statement reveals that Decius saw the Pope not merely as a religious cult leader, but as a **political competitor** commanding a "state within a state." Fabian was

executed immediately upon Decius's rise, confirming that his **ecclesiastical power**—his ability to organize and lead a vast demographic—was the primary danger in the emperor's eyes.

3. Strategic Decapitation: The Valerian Persecution (258 A.D.)

Emperor Valerian shifted Roman policy from punishing individual believers to specifically targeting the **ecclesiastical hierarchy** to break the church's power structure.

- **The Strategy:** Valerian's edicts in 257–258 A.D. did not initially call for the death of all Christians, but specifically ordered the execution of **bishops, priests, and deacons**.[5] [6]
- **The Victims:**
  - **Pope Sixtus II** was beheaded in the catacombs while teaching.[7] [8]
  - **Cyprian of Carthage** was beheaded for being the "ringleader" of an "unlawful association."
- **The Motivation:** These leaders were martyred because of their **administrative power**. The state believed that by cutting off the "heads" (the bishops), the "body" (the laity) would disperse and return to paganism. They were killed for their **rank and influence**, not just their personal refusal to sacrifice.

Counter-Example: Political Removal Without Martyrdom

To illustrate the difference, we can look at **Paul of Samosata** (Bishop of Antioch, c. 260–272 A.D.).

- **The Situation:** Paul was a wealthy, powerful bishop who served as a civil magistrate (*ducenarius*) and was allied with Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, a rival to Rome.
- **The Outcome:** When the Roman Emperor Aurelian reconquered Antioch, he **deposed** Paul.
- **Why it Matters:** Paul was removed for **political treason** (siding with Zenobia) and heresy, but he was **not martyred**. He was simply evicted from the church building by civil force. This shows that when the "faith" aspect was less central than the raw political alignment, Rome sometimes chose deposition over execution.[9] [10]

Summary Table: Reasons for Execution

Bishop	Year	Primary "Power" Threat	Outcome
Simeon of Jerusalem	c. 107	**Dynastic:** Descendant of King David (rival claimant).	Crucified
Pope Fabian	250	**Political:** Rival authority to the Emperor ("State within a State").	Executed in prison
Cyprian / Sixtus II	258	**Structural:** Heads of the organization; targeted to break the institution.	Beheaded
Paul of Samosata	272	**Geopolitical:** Allied with Rome's enemy (Zenobia).	Deposed (Not Martyred)

Conclusion: While no bishop in this period was executed *solely* for secular politics without religion being mentioned (since religion *was* politics in Rome), **Simeon of Jerusalem** is the strongest candidate for being killed for his **royal lineage**, and **Pope Fabian** was targeted specifically for the **threat of his office** to the Emperor's supreme authority.

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